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SPACE AND SOCIAL ORDER

Murray Edelman

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Space and Social Order

Murray Edelman

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ABSTRACT

Public buildings and the settings in which people work and live significantly influence acceptance of social inequalities, social roles, and definitions of individual competence, merit, and power. Spaces do not convey meanings as if they were simple codes, but rather objectify whatever shared meanings a group of people need to reinforce in one another to rationalize both privileges and disadvantages. It is as if beliefs that are undemonstrable or doubtful have to be objectified in an entity that then confronts people as reality. Each kind of public space evokes a number of different meanings, integrative or divisive, but their concurrence typically reinforces established inequalities.

Space and the Social Order*

That a man meets with his aides in the Oval Office of the White House reminds him and them and the public to whom the meeting is reported of his status and authority as President, just as it exalts the status of the aides and defines the mass public as nonparticipants who never enter the Office. Even the woman who mops the Oval Office floor gains some status from the setting of her work. The prisoner in a solitary confinement cell and the mathematician in an austere office may occupy somewhat similar rooms, but the setting constricts the dignity and autonomy of the one as potently as it helps establish the dignity and autonomy of the other. The spaces in which people interact with others--and some they rarely or never enter--help to define their status and power, and the nature of the social order. They subtly but powerfully evoke authority, dignity, independence, competence, creativity, and the opposites of all of these qualities.

Why do actors and actions need settings to complete such definitions and just how do spaces fit into the transaction that accomplishes it? Let me suggest a general explanation and then review some specific links among settings, actions, and power. People's occupations, education, income level, titles, achievements, and other cues directly influence individual power and status and the role structures within which individuals act; but such signals are always blurred. Often the cues are contradictory. The poor, for example, are seen both as lazy or incompetent and as victims

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*Edward Friedman has been an enormously helpful critic of the ideas advanced in this paper.

of unfair institutions or bad luck. The wealthy are seen both as industrious and competent and as parasites. A political prisoner is usually a hero to many and more degraded than a thief or murderer to many others. Such ambiguity and ambivalence regarding what is expected of people and their place in the social order is bound to generate anxiety. Elites feel concern about the continuation and the justification of their privileges. The disadvantaged feel unsure that their deprivations are necessary or deserved, but also feel some attachment to the regime and the polity that imposes the deprivations.

The individual mind is a marvelously sensitive organism that readily reflects a wide range of perceptions and beliefs, even when they are logically incompatible, as is evident from the range of cognitions regarding social issues that every individual experiences as he or she reacts to information and moves among different social situations. Consciously and unconsciously, individuals play with cognitions, rearrange them, and try out patterns of meaning to make them fit ambiguous and incomplete information. But concurrently with that skeptical and playful intellectual activity, there is another mode of cognition that helps people adapt to their social situations rather than deal adequately with information: a mode that reflects social cuing rather than individual use of a curious mind. We reinforce in one another a small set of beliefs that rationalize inequalities, social classes, and social roles: beliefs that justify privileges we do not want to give up and deprivations we cannot easily change. And we do so regardless of inconsistent facts. This second mental function, in effect, inhibits the free exploration of the social world and replaces it with

fixed, intense beliefs. Students of symbolism in psychology, anthropology, and philosophy explain the intensity and the fixation as the consequence of symbols that condense a wide range of individual fears, hopes, and cognitions into a focus on a narrow set of socially reinforced perceptions.[1]

For such condensation symbolism to gain its powerful hold on people's minds it seems necessary to objectify beliefs in some entity, visible or imagined, that has no semantic content in itself, so that its meaning must come from whatever people want to believe and read into it. In politics such terms as "divine will," "the public interest," "communism," "democracy," and "justice" serve that symbolic purpose; but so do widely known buildings and public figures that are accepted as objectifying some aspect of the polity or the social order.

Skeptical play with ideas about social issues is likely to engender anxiety and ambivalence, for it raises questions about the equity of many inequalities; and that doubtless explains the eagerness with which people reinforce rationalizing meanings in one another, fixating them through symbols that reassure all who are susceptible that others share their beliefs. It is as if beliefs that are undemonstrable and doubtful have to be objectified in an entity or concept that then confronts people as reality, repressing the tentativeness and the search for validity that are otherwise characteristic of the play of the human mind.

Like the linguistic terms that serve as symbols, spaces can therefore take on quite different meanings for different people and for different social situations. The space itself does not convey the meaning as if it were a simple code. It serves, rather, as an objectification

of whatever shared meaning a particular group of people need to reinforce in one another. The space or structure constitutes one part of a transaction whose other component is people who "take the role of the other" and thereby evoke shared meanings in one another.[2]

Observations accordingly generate anxiety about controversial issues; but public spaces symbolize widely held beliefs that are clear because they reflect psychological needs, not observations of the world. Conspicuous public buildings catalyze the common search for clarity, order, and predictability in a threatening world. For most Americans, the Oval Office symbolizes the power of the presidency and its reflection of the public will and therefore suppresses awareness of divisive opposition to the incumbent, distrust of the institution, or ambivalence about both. Acts must take place in settings. When the acts reflect ambivalence and social strain, as controversial political actions always do, the settings help to reestablish clarity. That is their symbolic contribution. Manifestly, that evocation reinforces established inequalities by reassuring both the advantaged and the disadvantaged that the social order of which they are a part is sanctioned by whatever grand symbols are currently accepted: divine will, the public will, reason, merit, or science.

Another characteristic of publicized spaces strengthens their connotation of continuity amid flux and therefore of order amid uncertainty. The spaces in which key decisions are formalized and key commitments made affect the well-being of large groups of people. The most publicized and cherished buildings, notably governmental or religious buildings, become significant symbols that remind everyone whose attention they

command that they share a common heritage and a common future, though it is a reconstructed past and a problematic future that rationalize current institutions and current decisions. It is true that some will not accept this meaning or accept it so ambivalently as to make it meaningless. German Jews under the Third Reich doubtless saw the Reichschancellery, the Sportspalast, and the Nuremberg Amphitheater as symbols of evil and repression rather than of Aryan supremacy and German nationhood. But that is, of course, another way of saying that the bonds of these Jews with the regime had been severed or weakened to the point of meaninglessness.[3] Symbols of unification can function only where there is already a bond to reinforce.

ARCHITECTURAL EVOCATIONS

Spaces contribute to social integration generally, but do so by strengthening particular meanings of specific spaces. Each public space evokes a number of different meanings, but with the striking characteristic that the meanings of a structure for different people and for different situations complement one another so as to reinforce established inequalities.

Consider some kinds of public spaces that are especially potent as social and political symbols. It is the monumentality of great public buildings and some corporate office buildings that most conspicuously distinguishes them from the rest of the environment. The scale of the structures reminds the mass of political spectators that they enter the precincts of power as clients or as supplicants, susceptible to arbitrary

rebuffs and favors, and that they are subject to remote authorities they only dimly know or understand. And the same monumentality carries a reciprocal meaning for the functionaries who enter these buildings regularly to exercise power. For them, the grand scale of the setting in which they make decisions emphasizes their authority and their distinction as a class from those who are subject to their decisions. Such spaces legitimize the power of elites and of officials in exactly the same way that they highlight the vulnerability of nonelites. These meanings of public spaces are never formally taught. They operate powerfully but subconsciously, though they are readily recognized once they are brought to attention.

Just as spaces hold nonobvious dialectical meanings for elites and nonelites that perpetuate domination and submission, so this practical effect of architectural symbolism is rationalized by still another dialectical meaning that is purely symbolic and so is deliberately disseminated and held in common. We are taught to see legislative halls, judicial chambers, executive mansions, and even administrative offices as symbols of government by the people, equality before the law, the places in which public servants carry out the public will, places where luck and arbitrary power play no part. These reassuring meanings coexist with the meanings that evoke domination and inequality in everyday life. Everyone recognizes both of them, and at different cognitive levels believes both. The net result of such dialectical realities is, in Kenneth Burke's insightful comment, to "blunt the too sharply pointed." The experiencing by nonelites of inequality, of rebuff, and of arbitrary power becomes easier to accept

and to rationalize because the symbolism of democracy and of equal protection is powerful. For elites, the symbolism justifies continuing and expanding their privileges in money, status, and power. For both groups spaces as symbols minimize the anxieties arising from the ambiguities and conflicting cues of everyday life. Logical inconsistency is no bar to psychological compatibility because the symbolic meanings both soothe the conscience of the elite and help nonelites to adapt readily to conditions they have no power to reject or to change. The availability in the culture of contradictory meanings enables both the privileged and the disadvantaged to accept and to rationalize their situations.

CONTRADICTORY BELIEFS

Specific architectural features of public and private buildings legitimize class distinctions in more direct ways. There is a consistent contrast among governmental offices according to the socioeconomic status of the clients who regularly transact business in them. The businessmen, lawyers, and interest group representatives who negotiate contracts, arrange for government subsidies, or bargain about administrative rules and the disposition of administrative proceedings do so for the most part in well-appointed, comfortable, sometimes lavish offices and conference rooms: spaces appropriate to the high stakes and handsome benefits that are involved. The settings are major contributors to the definition of such proceedings as the responsible implementation of the law by experts and professionals, though critics may see some of these transactions as the problematic use of public funds to subsidize those who

already have the most of what there is to get in money, status, and influence. These clients are not defined as getting "help" from government, but they win lucrative benefits from defense contracts, arms sales, favorable tax rulings, and other administrative judgments.

Another class of clients, exemplified by welfare applicants, emotionally disturbed people, and public school students, is explicitly defined as in need of "help" and by comparison gets very little of it. The settings in which they deal with bureaucrats define the worth of the clients as eloquently as do the bureaucratic offices discussed earlier, but in the opposite way. Waiting rooms are typically crowded and often drab and uncomfortable. The dependency of the client on the power and goodwill of the authority is reflected in the physical arrangements. To wait an indefinite time for a benefit that may be denied and is certain to be small acclimates the applicant to her or his vulnerability and powerlessness. In both contrasting cases, the setting that is appropriate to the act taking place in it is important politically because it helps to define the client as worthy or as suspect in the eyes of the general public. Though that public may rarely or never see either kind of office, it knows the setting, which establishes the appropriate view of the client and of the public policy by showing everyone what the generalized expectation is. In this sense it is the general impression of the setting that is symbolically and politically critical, even if that impression is invalid in a particular instance.

Private buildings as well as public ones serve this function, probably in a less subtle way. That the size, luxuriousness, or decrepit

condition of a house or an office building defines the worth of its inhabitants in both meanings of the word "worth," is taken for granted; and the definition of the self and of the other evoked in this way helps make the connotation a self-fulfilling prophecy. In this case the effect is so generally recognized that many people are tempted to buy houses and cars they cannot afford to create a more generous public definition of themselves.

Not only the individual structure, but also the neighborhood in which it stands, serve as constant reminders to the inhabitants and to others that they are worthy or unworthy. Though the effect is not consciously planned, the decaying neighborhoods, peeling paint, and shabby and crowded rooms that form the daily settings of the poor are likely to contribute to low self-esteem, defeatism, and low aspiration levels and therefore to docility and order. The inequalities of the general social structure reproduce themselves in substructures and perpetuate themselves through their psychological consequences. By the same token, zoning laws that protect the affluent from noise pollution from airports and air pollution from factories but systematically expose the poor to these blights are not consciously intended to perpetuate inequalities in income and in power or to induce acceptance of deprivation, though that may well be a more consistent consequence of zoning than its ostensible justifications, such as health protection, which is highly selective in its effects.

The expressive meanings of spaces therefore perpetuate order, and do so in conjunction with their evocation of a wide range of specific roles and self-conceptions. Particular features of buildings enhance and legitimize

specific differences among individuals. The artist's studio, the writer's study, the mathematician's office, and the monastic cell are places in which the worker's autonomy, creativity, or spirituality are expected to show themselves. The occupancy of such a space, though that space is often sparse, reaffirms this expectation for the occupant and for others. Another sparse room, the prison cell or the "quiet room" in a mental hospital, reinforces exactly the opposite definition of its occupant: the person whose autonomy is denied and whose behavior must be controlled. Yet, even in this instance the space catalyzes whatever evocation is socially reinforced. Among intellectuals one major evocation of prisons is that a great deal of original and moving writing has taken place in them; so that Antonio Gramsci and Huey Newton were joining an illustrious company when they wrote important books in prison.

The physical characteristics of a space manifestly do not constitute a code with a single meaning if physically similar spaces can convey different, even diametrically opposed, meanings. The point is, rather, that a typified space comes to stand for, and to reinforce, generalized expectations about its occupants' roles. Such generalized expectations do not take account of empirical observations suggesting that they should not reasonably apply, for example, to particular artists or mathematicians or mental patients because they have been inappropriately labeled or are the victims of prejudice or the beneficiaries of favor or of luck. Spaces affirm the established social roles by encouraging those who act and those who look on to respond to socially sanctioned cues and to ignore incompatible empirical ones. Spaces reaffirm a dialectic of hierarchical distinctions.

Work spaces in bureaucratic settings illustrate a similar point. Interior spaces can be constant reminders to workers and to onlookers of hierarchical distinctions: who wield authority to reward or punish, who are competent and independent, and who, by contrast, are under surveillance, in need of regulation to avoid nonconformity or incompetence. Architectural features create fine distinctions through symbols everyone learns to recognize: the desk surface free of papers, symbolizing delegation of work to subordinates, or the cluttered desk, symbolizing assignments that cannot be evaded or passed on; offices of different sizes, with or without various embellishments; a cubicle office with walls that do not reach the ceiling; or a workplace in a large newsroom, typing pool, or industrial loft; a bed in a barracks or in a psychiatric dormitory or prison, with nurses or guards able to bug conversations or exercise covert surveillance through closed circuit television.

It is, of course, the architectural contrasts that exalt or degrade occupants in such hierarchical settings. That mental patients in the sophisticated modern ward can be seen or heard without their knowledge defines the head nurse as omnipresent and all-knowing by the same token that it infantilizes the inmate as irrational and in need of close surveillance. And though the nurse may be less intelligent or less competent than the inmate or deluded by psychiatric mislabelling of the inmate's problem, the space as symbol encourages them both to act out the generalized expectation, not the one that fits their actual competencies (see Edelman, 1977). More than that, self-conceptions established by such symbols become self-fulfilling prophecies if not countered by conflicting cues. People

become the executives, the authorities, the psychotics, or the unreliable employees their settings tell them they are. Research in several kinds of highly structured settings reaches this depressing conclusion (Edelman, 1977, pp. 82-85).

Yet, while bureaucratic spaces help perpetuate the established order, government and business office buildings concurrently symbolize service to the people, responsiveness to change and to the public will, and other reassuring attributes that permit the privileged and the disadvantaged to live with their respective situations.

Spaces are especially powerful symbols when they convey meanings tacitly rather than explicitly. The Supreme Court building symbolizes justice explicitly, and so there is some incentive to question the validity of the symbol when a particular court decision seems unfair; but the difference in status symbolized by the crowded waiting room for welfare applicants and the plush office of the top administrator makes its point less explicitly, more subtly, and so more compellingly.

Architectural cues that are most potent when they function subconsciously reaffirm many other kinds of social relationships as well, and so help protect the social fabric against tearing and against drastic change. Especially subtle, powerful, and common are buildings that reinforce in public officials and masses a belief that their ties to a heroic past or a promising future are their important identities: that the immediate effects of their actions on contemporary people are trivial compared to their historic mission. The monumentality already mentioned serves this purpose, as does governmental, church, and business architecture in anachronistic styles: Roman, Greek Gothic, or the "modernistic" buildings that reflect a typification of a

future based on science fiction. The most unfeeling rebuffs, debasement, and destruction of flesh and blood human beings have come from those whose vision and passions were fixed on the good they would do in a problematic future, so that they could resolutely destroy people in order to save mankind. The fifteenth century Spanish Inquisitor, the contemporary lobotomist, and the Nazi heralds of the Thousand Year Reich are polar examples of this recurring form of political perception, and they all had impressive architectural symbols that reminded them and the mass public of their special grace as saviors.

Social controversy and ambivalence about public policies are reflected architecturally in revealing ways. The governmental bureaus that evoke both the strongest anxieties and the most powerful reassurances, defense and the FBI, are housed in especially monumental buildings that have become conspicuous symbols of the fears that war, crime, and subversion evoke. The Pentagon and the J. Edgar Hoover building seem designed to avoid any suggestion of ties to a past, real or mythical, and to emphasize bulk, labyrinths closed to the citizen, and awesome power. While the classic and graceful forms of the Capitol, the Supreme Court building, and the White House suggest a common heritage that helps to unite Americans whose class and group interests may diverge, these particular bureaucratic buildings evoke concerns that reflect differences in ideology and heighten ambivalence. It is as if the assertion of patriotism, nationalism, and national security through the volume and the obtrusiveness of the structures is a rebuff to that part of the population that sees the Defense Department and the FBI as possible threats to lives, to peace, or to liberties. By

the same token it is a rebuff to whatever internal qualms the supporters of these agencies may feel about their functions. This architecture reflects a distinctive subculture and a divisive ambiance, though its meanings are dialectical, as usual.

The theme of unity or divisiveness is a common motif in the symbolism of public spaces. It is a politically crucial theme because divisions are constantly mitigated and mystified both by symbols of unity and by social schisms that crosscut the oppositions based on class or ideology. Probably the most powerful kind of divisive influence that spaces can exercise is to define those outside them as alien, dangerous, subhuman, or superhuman. Some examples already mentioned do this. The FBI hierarchy apparently defined members of the Socialist Workers Party, antiwar demonstrators, and Martin Luther King as dangerous and alien to America and therefore fit for harassment and repression.

While the very existence of a space symbolizing such shared norms reifies, strengthens, and perpetuates the norms, certain spatial and physical arrangements markedly intensify this kind of effect without making people conscious that they are doing so. Such arrangements typically present themselves as technological aids, and their focus upon technique blurs awareness of the constrictive assumptions about values that they promote.

The key spatial characteristic that achieves this effect appears to be the consignment of a class of people to a space that does not intermesh with our own so that they are no longer perceived as significant others. They are no longer people from whose perspective one assesses one's own contemplated actions.

Modern bureaucratic technology makes such consignment to an alien space easy and unobtrusive and defines it as rationality. In terms of physical space its most common manifestation is the embodiment of a class of people on paper: as dossiers, file cards, or marks on a map. The filing cabinet becomes the appropriate setting such entities occupy, and their lives as files reaffirm their definition as objects with particular characteristics rather than as complete human beings. What is important about such an entity is a skill, a pathology, a criminal record, a physical shape that can lift weights or compete in a beauty contest, membership in a suspect organization, an age range, or a skin color. Decisions can be made, preferably quantitatively, that such people can be used, abused, favored, or repressed without the distracting knowledge of their human ties or their other talents or disabilities, and above all without empathy. Efficiency criteria rationalize the procedure, but it is made psychologically possible by the manipulation of spaces so as to convert human beings into predefined characteristics that have no bearing on their humanity. The result is alienating, for reasons Marx insightfully analyzed, and therefore socially divisive.

Perhaps the ultimate form of this characteristic modern phenomenon, both as the use of space to constrict perception and as alienation of people from others, occurs in the "war rooms" and operations planning rooms of military bureaucracies. If others are dots on a map in a context that highlights their aggressive potentialities, they <u>become</u> these aggressive characteristics, and it is easy to plot preemptive strikes or

chemical warfare against them, even while, in a setting a few blocks away in which people discuss common cultural interests, it is just as easy to plan the exchange of artists, ballet companies, and symphony orchestras with the potential bombing targets.

The effect of riding in automobiles upon the perception of pedestrians, bicyclists, and of other motorists teaches us that spaces can banish people to an alien universe even when those others are physically close by. People who are usually good-natured and gregarious are likely, as motorists, to resent, berate, and sometimes even attack, pedestrians, joggers, and other motorists who occupy part of the road. The key condition that facilitates this result seems to be that people are enclosed by different spatial boundaries, are moving at different speeds, and have no mode of communication and little mutual understanding about how to stay out of each other's way in unforeseen circumstances. Psychological isolation occurs in spite of total visibility. Indeed, this is the kind of visibility that increases alienation because, like visibility in a prison or mental ward, it is experienced as surveillance and threat. In such settings visibility and proximity only emphasize the impossibility of communication—of taking the other's role.

Clearly, spaces do not in themselves create self-conceptions or perceptions of others, but rather simplify and intensify beliefs and perceptions that already exist. In doing so, they inevitably select from among the range of potentialities to which every person is susceptible. Probably more important, they evoke the same intensified and simplified perception in individuals for whom a particular kind of space becomes significant.

That some settings evoke alienation and some symbolize common interests becomes especially important in a bureaucratized world. Decisions affecting the quality of people's lives, and even the duration of their lives, are made by officials, administrators, and professionals, who use abstract data rather than personal interaction as their premises. The critical space is not the homestead, the entrepreneur's personal office, the neighborhood, or any other environment in which people engage in direct intercourse about their livelihoods or their recreation, but rather the specialized bureau, the docket, and the filing cabinet that categorize people according to their abstracted qualities and therefore treat them as part of an alienated universe. And the alienation in its turn creates a need for symbols of a common interest and a persisting social order. As we have seen, spaces fulfill this reassuring psychological and political imperative as well with the same public space often serving both dialectical functions. The subtle influence of spaces as symbols of the kinds noted here becomes a more and more central aspect of politics, society, and personality.

It is the effects of symbols on the perceptions of the general public that is most important politically, even when they also convey special meanings for smaller groups. Several examples already cited exemplify the power of structures and spaces to establish and reaffirm hierarchies of values for a society: to define both goals and people as important or as expendable and to spread such values to a wide public.

These causes exemplify another characteristic of the most common political symbols: They win mass support for the values of those

groups that are already powerful, economically and politically; and they do it, at least partly, by creating a problematic impression that those values already command popular support.

Some kinds of structures are more problematic in the values they reflect and evoke. The questions they raise are intriguing even if the answers are less clear than in the instances cited earlier. The Illinois Agricultural Association objected a few years ago to a proposed undergraduate library at the University of Illinois in Urbana, whose shadow would have fallen during part of the day on the Morrow Plot, an acre of farm land located in the middle of the campus and long dedicated to crop experimentation. Alternative land was plentiful in the central Illinois prairie, so it was the historic and symbolic associations of the Morrow Plot, not its unique utility, that was at issue. The undergraduate library was constructed underground, with several levels of subterranean stacks and reading rooms, so it casts no shadow. It is tempting to see this resolution as a reflection of the high place accorded agriculture in Illinois folklore and politics (a ranking that must be expressed symbolically with all the more fervor as the population of the state and the nation becomes more lopsidedly urban). It may also be a more general expression of deep ambivalence about higher education in relation to other values. In this instance the conflict of values took the form of burying the undergraduates and their books while still giving them their library. The large appropriations of Midwestern states for public universities have often been accompanied by a strong strain of anti-intellectualism and of suspicion of the cosmopolitanism and alleged effetism some believe they instil in students.

It seems apparent that various needs that we categorize as separate, in practice, complement and reinforce one another: psychological needs for self-fulfillment; economic and status needs for the problematic definition of other people in a way that makes them available for use and abuse; and political needs for the maintenance of an established social order in which, whatever its pathologies, people accept their respective roles. The meanings of public spaces are therefore almost certainly overdetermined--in both the Freudian and Althusserian senses of that concept. The overall social structure is reflected in self-concepts, in economic transactions, in the political order, and in the meanings architectural structures take on.[4]

One way to examine overdetermination is to analyze in just what sense spaces serve as condensation symbols. As Freud recognized, the energy and affect attached to one kind of perception or object can be invested into other kinds of objects (cathexis), so that the latter seem to evoke passions out of all proportion to their intrinsic importance. The eagerness of some car drivers to flaunt the mechanical power they control and to define others as targets may, for example, reflect their resentment and anxiety about their social, economic, and political powerlessness as individuals. Their use of a particular form of space occupancy to express such resentment is all the more feasible because they are unconscious of the true source of their feelings. Spaces in general present themselves as having an explicit use function and an aesthetic function; that they can also condense psychological and economic anxieties

people do not want to face or consciously recognize makes them all the more powerful as political symbols, for the explicit function covers for the unconscious one.

Yet the very concurrence of psychological, economic, and political meanings calls attention to a constraint on the symbolic range of spaces: They play their parts only within the context of the hopes and the fears of specific social situations. They reinforce, condense, and reify perceptions, beliefs, and feelings that grow out of such social relations as dominance and dependency, alliance and hostility, anxiety about threats, or anticipation of future well-being. It is not, then, the automobile or the Pentagon war room screen as such that make targets of other people, but rather it is the potentiality of a hostile encounter that gives these spaces their meanings.

Because I am chiefly concerned with the bearing of spaces on social order, I have emphasized those evocations that contribute to the acceptance of established roles; but some structures and settings manifestly stimulate the imagination and the individual creativity of spectators. It hardly needs to be demonstrated that striking and original conceptions in the design of buildings encourage the onlooker to think in unconventional terms, even about matters that have no obvious connection with architecture. But this is simply to say that spaces stimulate intellectual play in individuals even while they catalyze socially reinforced perceptions in collectivities.

Studies have explored other aspects of the social symbolism of spaces and structures than those on which I focus here: the psychological

effects of crowding (Hall, 1969), the phallic and other connotations of structural forms (Freud, 1943, pp. 133-150), buildings as religious symbols (Eliade, 1957, pp. 20-67), and more.

That spaces fulfill so many functions simultaneously is added evidence for a point I made near the start: that the conspicuousness of public structures, together with their emptiness of explicit meaning, enables them to serve as symbolic reaffirmations of many levels of perception and belief arising from the aspirations, harmonies, and conflicts of everyday life. The very density of their symbolic archeology, the richness of their concurrent meanings, naturally makes it more likely that any particular level remains subconscious and mystified. Even when the associations of a space, setting, or structure seem clear, it is likely to be a deceptive clarity.

The multiple realities for which public spaces stand contribute, then, to social order, to social and political support for established hierarchies of status and power. They do so by helping individuals to reconcile ambivalence in themselves and ambiguities regarding the social world, to turn from one meaning to another, or to defy logic by holding several incompatible cognitions at the same time. To a pluralist this is an aspect of democracy; to a Marxist it is false consciousness. In any case an ongoing society is as inconceivable without the symbolic functions of public buildings as it would be without their physical and technological functions.

NOTES

[1]Among the major contributors to this view have been Sigmund Freud, Edward Sapir, Suzanne Langer, George Herbert Mead, and Harold Lasswell.

[2]This formulation is obviously taken from the work of Mead (1934).

[3]For an enlightening account of Nazi symbolism see Mosse (1975).

[4]I am grateful to Diane Rubenstein for clarifying the concept of "overdetermination" for me in an insightful paper, "Louis Althusser: His Basic Concepts," unpublished.

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